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*Ministers described, under the Characters of
Fathers and Prophets, and their Death
improved.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached to the Ministers and Messengers of
several ASSOCIATED CHURCHES,

At BETHESDA, near NEWPORT,

In the County of *Monmouth*,

The 9th of JUNE, 1773.

By HUGH EVANS, M. A. *h*

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ZECHARIAH i. 5.

*Your Fathers, where are they? and the Prophets, do
they live for ever?*

AN enquiry this, which may with great propriety be made at any time, as one generation continually passeth away and another follows; but with much greater propriety upon the present solemn occasion, as the worthy father who was to have addressed you in this your annual assembly, is no more.* The places that once knew him, in the family, in the church, and in this annual assembly for a long series of years, shall know him no more for ever. Though but a few weeks ago many now present, saw, conversed with, and attended the ministrations of our venerable friend; yet now he is removed from us, and we shall see his face, we shall hear his voice no more. He is gone from the temple below to the temple above; from this assembly, to the more illustrious assembly of the first-born in heaven; there to unite with the spirits of the just made perfect, in the

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sublime

* The Rev. David Thomas of Kilvour,

sublime and exalted services of that blissful world.
 —From this unexpected event, we are naturally led to recollect many others of our venerable fathers, who once used to assist in these annual assemblies, but are now removed from us. May we not then, with peculiar but mournful propriety, adopt the enquiry in our text, and with the prophet say,—*Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?* And as the prophet urged this consideration as a powerful motive to engage the people of the Jews, to whom he wrote, to turn from their evil ways and doings to the Lord, and not to be as their fathers who did not hear nor hearken to what the Lord said to them by the prophets; so it may, surely, be urged with equal propriety to stir up the men of this generation, to forsake their sinful courses and to turn to the Lord. The mortality of men in general has a natural tendency to answer this end, but much more should the death of truly good and eminent men, of fathers and prophets, excite their brethren especially, to attend with diligence and zeal to the various services to which they are called. With this view the words were chosen, and are now proposed to your candid consideration.

Who this *Zechariah* was that wrote the prophecy of which our text is a part, is not certain. Some suppose he was the father of John the Baptist; others, that *Zecharias* who was slain between the temple and the altar, of whom mention is made

Matt.

Matt. xxiii. 35; and others suppose him to have been that *Zechariah*, the son of *Jehoiada* the priest, who is mentioned *2 Chron.* xxiv. 20. But as there are material objections to each of these opinions, I am rather inclined to think, with a late learned commentator, that he was one of the captivity in Babylon, who came up from thence with *Zerubabel*, *Neh.* xii. 16. and was cotemporary with the prophet Haggai. He began his prophecy soon after him, in the eighth month, which answers to part of our *October* and *November*, in the second year of *Darius Hystaspes* king of Persia.

The design of this prophecy was to stir up the Jews to build the temple, and reform the many abuses which had crept into the worship of God amongst them; and also, to encourage their faith and hope in the promised Messiah, who is spoken of as the *BRANCH*, *ch.* iii. *ver.* 8. whom the Lord promised to bring forth. Of him and the blessings of grace to be expected in and through him, the prophet reminds them, agreeably to the import of his name, *a remembrancer of the Lord*, or *the memory of the Lord*. By divine direction he calls upon them to return to the Lord, and strongly recommends this to them from the consideration of his sore displeasure with their fathers, and his being ready to return to them, *ver.* 2, 3. And some think the words of our text are brought in by way of anticipating an objection they might be ready to make, that their fathers were no more,
and

and the prophets were dead, and therefore they need not regard them or their sayings. To which the prophet is supposed to reply, ver. 6.—that notwithstanding the fathers and prophets were no more, yet that the words which the Lord commanded his servants the prophets to speak to their fathers, had taken hold of them, and the judgments threatened were executed upon them, many of them dying in Babylon by the Chaldean sword. And he further intimates to them, that the words of the Lord by the prophets who now spoke to them, should take hold of them also, and that it behoved them therefore seriously to attend to what was spoken, before it was too late. The general meaning of the passage evidently is, that though their fathers were no more, and the prophets did not live for ever, yet that the word of the Lord remained firm and immoveable, and should have in due time its accomplishment, and that therefore they should give the more earnest heed to what was spoken.

In further discoursing from the words, I propose

I. To consider the character of the persons spoken of, *fathers* and *prophets*.

II. The import of the enquiry here made concerning them. *Where are they? Do they live for ever?*

III. Close with some suitable improvement of the subject.

I. I am

I. I am to consider the character of the persons spoken of, *fathers* and *prophets*.

The term *fathers* is used in different senses. Literally, it intends the fathers of our flesh, our progenitors; concerning whom many present may say—where are they? for they have long since left us, and are no more. But the word *fathers* is often used in a figurative sense, and sometimes intends the aged or the ancients; in which sense it is applied to the patriarchs and heads of the tribes of Israel, such as *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, and their successors; see *John* vii. 22. *Rom.* ix. 5, 10. Sometimes kings, who are supposed to act a paternal part towards their subjects, are called nursing fathers; and magistrates of an inferior class, who should be as fathers to the people, have the same appellation given them. *Isai.* xlix. 23. The founders of any institution are also called fathers. *Jabal* was called the father of such as dwelt in tents, and *Jubal* the father of all such as handled the harp and organ, *Gen.* iv. 20, 21. In like manner *Cicero* calls *Isocrates* the father of eloquence. Sometimes the term *fathers* is applied to persons of considerable eminence, and Christians particularly of great attainments in the divine life, are thus denominated, 1 *John* ii. 13. But it is more to my present purpose to observe, that *Ministers* and *Pastors* of churches may with peculiar propriety be described under the character of fathers. In which sense this word appears to
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be used by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. iv, 15. *yet have ye not many fathers.* The propriety of its application, in this particular point of view, is what I am now to illustrate and improve.

Ministers then, I would observe, may be called *fathers*,

1. As the character of fathers necessarily supposes and implies children, to whom they stand related as fathers.

And are not those happy souls who are converted unto God by the instrumentality of his ministering servants, the *children* of such ministers? In Christ Jesus, says the apostle Paul addressing himself to the Corinthians, I have *begotten* you through the gospel. And what are the members that compose different churches, but the *children* of those ministers who have the care of them in the Lord? The venerable apostle John often speaks of such persons under the character of *children*. *Little children let no man deceive you, and, little children keep yourselves from idols.* It has pleased the great parent of the universe, and father of his church, to make use of his ministering servants as the *instruments* of raising to himself a church out of the ruins of the fall, and of repairing it from time to time as it is laid waste by death; on which account they may with the greatest propriety be described under the character of fathers. By the instrumentality of the patriarchs and prophets of old, God raised up and supported the Jewish church, during that dispensation; and under the gospel-

gospel dispensation he was pleased to make use of the apostles as instruments, to plant the first christian churches in different parts of the world; and by the instrumentality of succeeding ministers he has continued a church in the world to the present day, making use of his ministering servants as *fathers* to build up his family.

2. Ministers may be stiled *fathers*, because fathers are generally supposed to be men of knowledge and experience.

Fathers have the direction of their respective families, and having seen more of men and things than children that are but of short understanding in the world, they are supposed to be qualified for the station they possess. *Days should speak, says Elihu, and multitude of years should teach knowledge,* Job xxxii. 7. But if fathers in a natural sense are supposed to be men of knowledge and experience, how much more may this be expected of fathers in Christ? Ministers, spiritual fathers, are to teach and instruct others; but how can they do this, if they are not men of knowledge themselves? It is a trite but very true maxim, *nemo dat quod non habet*, no one gives or can give what he has not; and a minister therefore that has not a fund of knowledge and experience himself, can never impart knowledge and instruction to others. Ministers are to explain and illustrate to their people or family, the contents of that divine volume which is the universal standard of christian faith

and practice, the bible. And here we have the richest treasure laid up, knowledge of every kind in abundance. Things natural, and things spiritual, things civil, and things sacred are here treated of; and we have here moreover many things hard to be understood, mysteries of providence, and mysteries of grace, which require to be unfolded and explained. There are in this sacred book great and important truths, various duties, and an account of the manifold exercises and trials of good men in the different stations and circumstances in which they have been placed; all which with a variety of other things of a like nature, are to be attended to, explained, illustrated and improved as occasion may require. But how can this be done without a good degree of knowledge and judgment? Ministers are expected to bring out of the sacred repository things new and old, rightly to divide the word of truth, and to give to every one his portion in due season. But this requires skill in the word of righteousness, the tongue of the learned, thus to speak a word in season to weary souls, and to accommodate ourselves to the various circumstances and necessities of those we have to do with. Nor is a degree of knowledge alone sufficient, but it requires much experience in the things of God, to enable us to deal properly with tempted and distressed souls. Those who, like their divine master, have been themselves tempted, know best how

to succor them that are tempted. Experience is generally the best teacher, and the more experience ministers have, the better qualified they are for the various duties of their office. Accordingly when the apostle *Paul* describes a christian bishop or father, he says,—*not a novice*, one lately converted to the christian faith, a raw, ignorant, unexperienced person; but one who has been of some standing in the church of God, and has attained a competent share of knowledge and experience.—And of what infinite service would it be to the church of God, and what an honor would it reflect upon the ministerial character, were the ministers of Christ in general *fathers* indeed, in the sense that has now been explained! An intelligent, experienced and judicious minister, is one of the greatest blessings a people can enjoy; and a greater curse cannot well befall a people, than to have an ignorant, inexperienced, and injudicious minister settled amongst them. Hence we find ministers are exhorted to study, to meditate, to read, to pray, to seek for knowledge as for silver, and to search for it as for hid treasure. *Wisdom*, says Solomon, *is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom*, says he, *and with all thy getting, get understanding*, Prov. ii. 4.—iv. 5, 7. Who is not convinced of the importance of knowledge and experience in a *father*, to the credit and advantage of his family? And who then must not see the infinitely greater importance of knowledge and ex-

perience in a *minister*, a father in Christ, to the wellfare of the church of God? The priests lips under the law, were to keep and dispense knowledge; and surely it is not *less* necessary they should do so, under the gospel.

3. Ministers may be called fathers, as this character implies and supposes gravity and sobriety.

A light vain spirit and conduct ill become the character of a father, and a vicious immoral behavior is still more unsuitable to it. Fathers are naturally supposed to be men of gravity and sobriety, and when they are otherwise, they are what they *ought not* to be. *Titus* is commanded to enforce upon the *aged men* that they be *sober, grave, temperate*; and a gospel bishop or father MUST BE, it is expressly said, Tit. i. 8. *sober, just, holy, temperate*.—*Fathers* should be patterns to their families, setting a good example before them, and leading them by example as well as precept and exhortation. The very name *father* carries something venerable in it, and we naturally expect something more and better from *fathers* than from the inferior members of the family. Spiritual fathers should in an especial manner be concerned to be ensamples to their respective flocks, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. They are placed by providence in very conspicuous stations, at the head of their several families or churches, and more therefore is expected from them than from others. *Children*
may

may plead their years and inexperience as an excuse for *their* unallowed foibles and infirmities; but *fathers* cannot urge any thing of this nature.— The importance of a good example in those particularly who sustain the character of spiritual fathers, may be argued from their own reputation, peace, and comfort; for what satisfaction or pleasure can they have in a reflection upon their conduct, if they are conscious of having fundamentally failed in this respect? Must not their own hearts, to say nothing of the reproaches of others, accuse and condemn them? — And then further, the welfare of the family greatly depends upon the good example of the head of it. If the head be disordered, the whole body will be more or less affected. The credit of religion, the success and spread of the gospel, the honor of God, of Christ, and the happiness of precious souls, are closely connected with what I am now recommending. In short, as the very existence of families, as well as states and kingdoms, depends in a great measure on the good conduct of the heads of them; so the very being of the church, and the continuance of religion in the world, under God, greatly depends on the good conduct of the ministers of the gospel. By the pious examples of christian ministers or fathers, the professors of religion are confirmed and encouraged in the good ways of God; they hereby see there is a reality in religion. Sinners are convinced of
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the error of their way, and seeing the light of pious examples shining before them, are induced to glorify God. The mouths of infidels are stopped and they are left without excuse. But on the other hand, what infinite damage is done to the cause of God and religion in the world, by the unholy lives of those who are fathers, by office at least, in the christian church! Hereby sinners are hardened in their sins, enquiring souls are discouraged and stumbled, the gospel and the ministry of it greatly exposed and degraded, the great Redeemer wounded in the house of his pretended friends, crucified afresh, and put to open shame! There are no greater enemies to Christ and his gospel in the world, than ungodly, unholy ministers. They not only destroy their own souls but the souls of others likewise. And to see *fathers* wallowing in the mire of sin, drinking in iniquity like water, running into every excess of riot, how shocking! To see fathers in years, fathers by office, ministers of the holy gospel, ministers of the holy Jesus, act an unholy part, abandon themselves to immoral courses, and instead of going before their people in the ways of holiness, leading them into the paths of sin and destruction;—how awful, how exceedingly affecting! Would to God no such ministers were to be found in our land, or in any of our churches! But alas! we have too much reason to cry out with the prophet, *Jer. ix. 1. Oh that our heads were waters,*

waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, that we might weep day and night for the slain, in this respect, of the daughter of our people ! And with the apostle, may we not complain, that some walk, of whom we may with weeping say, they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, who mind earthly things !

I have dwelt the longer on this head, from a deep conviction of the great importance of that exemplary behavior in the ministers of the gospel, which I have so warmly recommended, and which seems so essentially to enter into the paternal character. And the Lord grant that what has been offered may have the desired effect ! That the fathers of the church may be more like the great head of the church, and tread in the pious footsteps of those of their honored predecessors, who adorned their character, and were concerned, like the great apostle of the Gentiles, to *keep under their bodies and bring them into subjection, lest by any means, when they had preached to others, they themselves should be cast-aways*, and others, by their means, be for too !

4. Ministers may be called fathers, as it is the duty of fathers to provide for their families.

To whom shall children look for the supply of their daily wants, but unto their parents ? And from whom can they expect provisions for their future support, but from their parents ? The children are not expected to lay up for the parents,
says

says the apostle Paul, *but the parents for the children.* 2 Cor. xii. 14. *And if any man provide not for his own,* says the same apostle, 1 Tim. v. 8. *he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* And in like manner it is the duty of ministers to *feed* the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers. They are to feed them with the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness. They are to feed them with knowledge and good understanding, the knowledge of God, his perfections and attributes, his works, and more especially his word. They are to feed them with the knowledge of Christ, the glories of his person as God-man the great Mediator, his stupendous love and grace in undertaking and executing the great work of redemption, the infinite value and virtue of his sacrifice and atonement, and the perfection and excellency of his spotless righteousness. They are to feed them with the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, his person, office, and operations upon the hearts of men, and the absolute need of his aid and influence through the whole of the christian life. Nor are they to teach their people what they ought to believe only, but also what they should do, how they should behave in every station and relation in which they may be placed. They are to teach them the duties as well as doctrines of christianity, the duties of the second as well as of the first table, shewing them that what
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the Lord requires of them is *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God*, Mic. vi. 8. They should lay before their people the nature and extent of the divine law, shewing how it is at once the rule of our life and conversation, and a school-master to lead us to Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. They should shew their people from what principles, and with what views they should act in all they do, and their absolute need of divine assistance for the right and acceptable discharge of every duty. Nor are the experiences and trials of good men, nor their supports and comforts to be passed over in silence. *Come*, says David, *all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul*, Pf. lxvi. 16. In a word, they who are true *fathers* in Christ will keep back no part of the counsel of God, but bring forth things new and old, milk for babes, and strong meat for strong men, shewing themselves to be fathers indeed to those under their care.

Nor will they be concerned for the present happiness only, but also for the future and permanent felicity of their respective families. Here I am naturally led to take notice of the late repeated applications to parliament for the enlargement and establishment of our religious liberties, and particularly for the removal of those penal laws which, though still in being, are so shocking to humanity, that the very enemies of toleration them-

selves are ashamed even to attempt their vindication. Great are our obligations to those of our worthy brethren and fathers in London, who have so nobly exerted themselves in this noble cause. A cause so just, so honorable, so important, that I know not how to suppose but that in the end it must be triumphant. Our forefathers struggled hard, yea strove unto blood in the cause of liberty, and to them are we indebted, and to their glorious efforts, under God, for the liberties we now enjoy. Let us not then behave unworthy of our relation to such distinguished genuine patriots; but whilst we are truly thankful for the liberties we enjoy under the present mild and auspicious government, let us contribute all we can to transmit them down to our posterity, if possible, with additional advantage. Mere indulgence and connivance are by no means equal to legal security. And why *good subjects*, let their religious opinions be what they will, should not enjoy *legal security*, who can say? Are any ready to insinuate the cause of truth would be hereby injured? It is an unjust and dishonorable insinuation. Liberty is a friend of truth, which neither needs nor rests upon any human support, but upon that God who is the author of it. The weapons of our warfare are *not carnal*, and *the wrath of man*, it behoves us to remember, *worketh not the righteousness of God*. The great God himself allows us liberty to judge for ourselves, calling upon us in his word to *prove* all things;

things; and shall we then wish to deprive one another of this liberty? What can be more unreasonable! The rights of conscience ought ever to be esteemed sacred; but sacred they are not, nor can be, if they are allowed to be *violated* in any instance. If the civil magistrate presumes to determine who are and who are not entitled to protection, on account of their *merely* religious sentiments and practice, the very foundation of all our religious liberties is absolutely destroyed. Let us then, with a steadiness and zeal equal to the importance of the cause, act the genuine part of fathers, by endeavoring to provide for the permanent happiness of our successors. Let us by our conduct prove ourselves to be the genuine sons of those worthy fathers into whose labors we are entered. The many excellent tracts * which have been published upon this subject, and which will reflect immortal honor upon their respective authors, render any further enlargement on this head unnecessary; especially when I consider that I am addressing myself to those, who, I am confident, generously *disdain* to harbor in their breasts a spirit of persecution under any form, and cannot therefore wish to have any of their brethren entangled with a yoke of bondage.

5. Ministers may be described under the character

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* Dr. Stennett's, Dr. Kippis's, Dr. Furneaux's, Dr. Gibbons's, Mr. Wilton's, Mr. Fowne's, cum multis aliis.

rafter of fathers, as this character implies in it tenderness and love.

Like as a father pitieth his children, says the psalmist, *so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,* Pf. ciii. 13. The various infirmities and afflictions of a family, call for the exercise of tenderness and love in a parent. And a cruel merciless parent is a monster in nature, and a reproach to mankind. And should not ministers then, fathers in Christ, be men of tenderness, compassion and christian love? Should they not be ready, like their divine master, not to *break the bruised reed*, nor *quench the smoking flax*; to *gather the lambs with their arm*, and *carry them in their bosom*, and *gently lead those that are with young*? How unworthy the character of a *father* in Christ must he be, who has no compassion for the souls of his people, cares not what becomes of them, and concerns not himself about them. And yet, are there not too many such to be found? The prophet complains of some of this character, who with force and cruelty ruled the flock, and he threatens them with sore judgments. Happy would it be, were there none of this complexion in our times! But would we indeed act the part of *fathers* to our people, let us then exercise the greatest tenderness and love towards them.

6. Ministers may be stiled fathers, on account of the authority with which they are invested.

Fathers have a natural authority over their children and families, and so have ministers over the
spiritual

spiritual household committed to their care. *We have had*, says the apostle, Heb. xii. 9. *fathers of our flesh, who corrected us and we gave them reverence.* And christians are exhorted to *obey them that have the rule over them in the Lord*, Heb. xiii. 17. But then they are to rule, it should be remembered, not as arbitrary lords whose will is to stand for a law, but they are to rule by the direction of their great Lord and Master, in a spirit of meekness and love, and for the good and with the concurrence of the family. They are not to lord it over God's heritage, as though they had dominion over their people's faith, but to be helpers of their joy.

7. And lastly. Ministers may be called fathers on account of the respect due to them from those to whom they stand related in this connexion.

A son honoreth his father. If I am a father where is mine honor? Mal. i. 6. And we are directed, you know, to esteem the ministers of Christ very highly in love for their work's sake, and to account such as rule well, worthy of double honor, 1 Tim. v. 17. Fathers in Christ, whilst they support their characters with dignity, are entitled to respect and honor, their instructions ought to be received and regularly attended to, and every thing necessary for the supply of their various wants should be chearfully communicated to them. If they furnish the household with spiritual provisions, is it a great thing for the household to supply them
with

with temporal and carnal things? Nay, has not God *ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel?* 1 Cor. ix. 14. How reproachful for children to suffer their fathers to want, when they have it in their power to supply them; or to supply them but scantily, when they are able to do it liberally!

You see then with what propriety, on various accounts, the ministers of Christ may be described under the character of *fathers*. The other character mentioned in our text, is that of *prophets*.

Prophets were men raised up of God in an extraordinary manner, and who were inspired to foretell things to come. But by the prophets spoken of in our text, some suppose we are to understand the *false prophets*, and that the consideration of their being now no more able to delude them, being gone the way of all the earth, is mentioned as a motive to stir up the people to return unto the Lord, from whom they had shamefully revolted. Though it should rather seem the *true prophets* are intended, and that their not living for ever, is mentioned as being nevertheless no reason for disregarding what was spoken by them, since the word they delivered would live, when they were dead.—But the term *prophets* is sometimes applied to ministers in general, and by prophesying we are to understand preaching. See 1 Cor. xiv. 1, 3. It was the work and office of the prophets of the Lord, to make known his mind
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and will to men: and is not this the business of ministers now? They are to declare to their people the whole counsel of God as it is delivered in the sacred scriptures, and should see to it that they be true not false prophets, that they declare not inventions, fancies and nostrums of their own, but the counsel of God.

Having thus considered the characters of the persons spoken of in our text, *fathers* and *prophets*, I proceed to consider

II. The import of the inquiry here made concerning them. *Where are they? Do they live for ever?*

The meaning of which questions is,

1. That many of the fathers were dead, and that the prophets do not live for ever, but die as well as others.

Your fathers, where are they? As though he had said, are not many of them removed from us, are not many of them dead, and gone to the land of silence? Surely they are. They are here many of them no more. The places that once knew them, and which they occupied with honor and advantage, shall know them no more. And the prophets do they live for ever? No; but they also die and go the way of all the earth. Death makes no distinction. The grave is an house appointed for all living, in which the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, fathers and their children, prophets and their people, all meet together.

together.—And of how many, who were once fathers amongst us, may we mournfully say, *where are they?* They are not in their own houses, presiding in their families, praying with and for them, and teaching and instructing them; they are not in the churches where they were wont to reason daily of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come; they are not in this our annual assembly;—alas! where are they? Why, sad to say, they are, as to this world, no more! Their countenances are changed and they are sent away. Our venerable father who was now to have addressed us, is gone to his long home. “*The watchful eye, in darkness clos’d—And mute th’ instructive tongue.*” The prophets, do they live for ever? No, but die, and return to the dust. But then I would observe in the

2d place. We are not to suppose, from the enquiry here made concerning the fathers and prophets, that they are blotted out of existence, and have a being no where.—’Tis true, they do not live here for ever, they are, as to this world, no more. But is it asked where are they? Blessed be God, we can assuredly answer, they are where they longed to be, they are with Jesus their dear Lord and Master, who has positively said, where I am, there *shall* also my servant be; they are joined to the general assembly above, incorporated with the blessed spirits around the throne, and employed in celebrating the praises of their God
and

and king, to whose grace they are indebted for all their dignity and glory. They shall no more be called to struggle with any of those various trials which once painfully exercised them, for they have quitted the field of combat, and are become conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him that hath loved them.

But methinks I hear some ready to say — but why are the fathers and prophets thus removed from us? Why are we so soon deprived, as is often the case, of their company and their labors? Why are we so frequently left like orphans, distressed and exposed; left, like sheep without a shepherd? Perhaps it may be on such accounts as these.

1st. Because it is the righteous appointment of God that all men should once die. Ministers as well as others; for the universal wages of sin is death, and we have all sinned and are become guilty before God. Enoch and Elijah indeed were translated to heaven in an extraordinary manner, but these are singular instances, nor have we any reason now to expect the like indulgence. The fathers, prophets, and patriarchs under the former dispensation, and the apostles, evangelists, and succeeding ministers under the present dispensation; — where are they? And if they are no more, must not we in our turn follow?

2. Prophets and fathers die, because when they

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have

have finished the work given them to do, there is no farther occasion for their continuance in life.

There is an appointed time for men and for ministers on the earth, and a work assigned them to do; and when this is finished they have liberty to retire that they may enter into the joy of their Lord. Thus says our blessed Lord, *I have finished the work thou gavest me to do*, John xvii. 4. which he mentions as a reason why he should withdraw from the world and return to his father. And *I have finished my course*, says the apostle Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. *henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness*. And in like manner it is said of David, Acts xiii. 36. *that when he had served his generation, he fell asleep*. And so, those who are now on the stage of action, when they have finished the work assigned them, may retire and go to their fathers. It is an old, but I think true saying, *every minister is immortal till his work is done*.

3. The death of fathers and prophets may be designed to teach us, not to indulge an excessive fondness for them on the one hand, nor to treat them with a criminal indifference on the other.

I am of Paul, says one, and I am of Apollos, says another—now says the apostle, *who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?* Are any ready to idolize their ministers, and make a kind of Gods of them; let it be remembered they shall die like men. Your fathers, where

are

are they? and the *prophets*, do they live for ever? —Or on the other hand, are any ready to despise them, and deal unkindly by them; let it be remembered they are dying men. They are earthen vessels, and should be used tenderly therefore lest they be broken. It is but for a season they are continued with us, they will soon be removed from us, and the least therefore they can expect whilst they are with us, is to be treated kindly and affectionately by us. Besides, they are going to give an account to their Lord of the treatment they have received from us, and he has said, *he that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye*, Zech. ii. 8.

4. Sometimes christian fathers and prophets are removed in a way of righteous judgment upon those who slighted and disregarded them and their ministrations.

Many fathers are taken from their families in a way of righteous judgment upon their wicked and undutiful children; and many pious ministers are removed out of the vineyard because slighted and abused by those who enjoyed the benefit of their labors, Matt. xxiv. 34, 35. And when ministers are thus removed in judgment, how awful is the visitation! The loss of substance, friends, near and dear relations, the loss of life and the various blessings of it, must be exceeding great; but how much greater the loss of the gospel and the ministry of it, to a people that once enjoyed these privileges?

The loss of a tender father is often esteemed the greatest a family can sustain ; but how much greater the loss of a spiritual father to the church of God ? The loss of natural light is great ; but the loss of the light of life infinitely greater. Let us then deprecate as the sorest judgment, having our spiritual fathers removed from us in a way of righteous indignation.

5. Ministers may be called off the stage of life to make way for others to succeed them, and in order to the accomplishment of great and important purposes with respect to the church.

When the fathers who had long borne the heat and burden of the day, and were worn out with their various labors, are removed by death, way is made for others to be introduced in their room who may be more active and useful. As when an instrument, however good and useful it might have been, yet when worn out becomes in a great measure useless, and is therefore laid aside and a new one prepared, so it is with ministers. The fathers are removed, to make way for their sons to succeed them. The fathers are gathered in like a flock of corn fully ripe, they enter into rest, are advanced to higher and nobler services, and receive the promised reward ; that their sons and successors may enter into their labors, and carry on the great schemes of providence and grace, with greater vigor and zeal than they, in the decline of life, were capable of exerting. And the

the death of ministers has sometimes been the means of greatly alarming and awakening sinners, and rousing sleepy saints. And thus by the death even of fathers and prophets, the important designs of providence are fulfilled, and the interests of Christ and religion remarkably promoted.

It only remains, in the

III. And last place, that we close the subject with some suitable improvement.

And 1. Are many of our fathers no more, and do the prophets not live for ever? Should not this excite those of this character who yet remain, to work whilst it is called to-day?

If we are sure we must soon resign our trust, should we not be very careful to be able to do it with joy and not with grief and shame? If we shall be fathers but a little while, should we not be careful to support the character with reputation and dignity whilst we sustain it? Are we shortly to take our final leave of our children and family, of our churches and people;—should we not be concerned to do it in an honorable manner? What a pity it is, our sun should set in a cloud! Are we soon to be removed; should we not then apply ourselves to our work and business with more zeal and earnestness than ever? Should we not be instant in season and out of season, spend, and be spent, in our private and public labors, and like the morning light, advance to the perfect day?

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Should we not be ready to say—" I shall pray, I shall praise, I shall preach, in my family, in the church, or in the world, in a little while, no more; and I will improve therefore the remnant of time left me to the utmost of my power, and to the best of purposes! A few days more and all my labors will be at an end; the shades of the evening are drawing apace over me; I will apply therefore to the great business of my station with greater assiduity than ever. I will work whilst it is day, and before the night of death comes in which no man can work; and by increasing diligence and zeal labor to fill up the places of those venerable fathers who are now no more." Thus *should* we, and thus, I trust, we *shall* improve the removal of our fathers from us.

2. Are our worthy fathers gone, and are *we* left to fill up their places;—how should this consideration humble and abase us under a sense of our great insufficiency for so important a service?

Who and what are *we*, to appear in the room of such worthy and eminent men? How unlike them, many of us may say, in our qualifications, and in zeal and activity! Should we not then apply to the throne of grace with greater importunity than ever, and seek from God, those supplies of grace, which are necessary to fit us for the discharge of the various duties incumbent upon us! Let us put, my brethren, our trust and confidence
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in the Lord, in whom is everlasting strength, and learn to exercise a firm and steady dependance upon him. Have we lost many of our fathers; let us look more to and depend more upon the Everlasting Father. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. He has said, *Fear not I am with you, as I was with your fathers so will I be with you, I will never fail nor forsake you, be strong and of good courage*, Josh. i. 2, 5, 6. The residue of the spirit is with the Lord.

3. Are many of the fathers and prophets gone, and are we following them;—whither are we going?

Our pious fathers are gone to God as their own God, to Christ as their Savior, and to the blessed company of angels and happy spirits. Are we travelling the same road, and tending to the same state? We know, we are going to the grave as to our bodies, and our spirits to God that gave them; we know we are going to give up our stewardship—but what account can we give of it? Have we been good and faithful stewards, or have we been careless and indolent, wicked and unjust? Have we occupied the talents with which we were intrusted, or have we hid them in the earth, concluding our master was hard and unreasonable? There were of old *false* prophets, *false* apostles, and *false* teachers; now what are we? What are the principles from which we act, and the views we have in what we do? And what is the end like to be;—

be ;---honor and glory, or shame and everlasting contempt? *Dan. xii. 2.* If we are found good and faithful servants we shall enter into the joy of our Lord ; but if wicked and unprofitable, shall be cast into into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. *Matt. xxv. 21, &c.* Our character as fathers, however venerable, and our office however honorable ; the good opinion others may form of us, and the applause they may bestow upon us ; will not secure our final happiness. By the fruit the tree is known. *Be not then deceived, God is not mocked. What a man soweth, that shall he also reap, Gal. vi. 7.*

4. Do the fathers and prophets die, should not this excite those amongst whom they labor, more diligently and carefully to attend their ministrations ?

If you certainly knew this or the other sermon would be the *last* your minister would ever preach ; how desirous would you be of hearing it, and with what seriousness and concern would you attend to it ? Now how do you know but every sermon you hear *may* be the last ? and should you not therefore attend to it as though it were ? As your ministers should preach as dying men, so you should hear as dying men. I dare say many are ready to acknowledge, that if their worthy fathers who are removed by death were now with them, they would pay greater regard to their instructions and counsels, and attend more diligently
upon

upon their ministrations than they did heretofore. Should you not then be concerned thus to improve the labors of those who are still continued amongst you?—And as the children of the family should improve the company of the fathers and prophets whilst they have it, so others who are more remotely connected with them, and may reap advantage from them, should be concerned to improve the opportunities put into their hands. Sinners as well as saints should prize those blessed seasons of grace with which they are indulged. Permit me, my friends, to address you on this subject in the most affectionate manner. You have been often called upon and persuaded by every thing sacred, by the mercies and terrors of the Lord, to forsake your evil ways and turn to the Lord. He sends his ambassadors to you to beseech you, in Christ's stead, that ye be reconciled to God. They reason and expostulate with you, in the most moving and pathetic language; they pray for you, weep over you, and travel as it were in birth till Christ be formed in you. Now how sad must be your situation, if you are suffered to turn a deaf ear, and refuse to hearken to what is so interesting, and infinitely important! Many that have thus affectionately addressed you are no more, and those who now address you will soon follow them. In a little while they will be called to give an account of their stewardship; and what account, think you, will they be able to give of you? Will

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they not be obliged to adopt the prophet's complaint, *all the day long I have stretched out my hands to a gainsaying and rebellious people?* And think, Sirs, what horror and amazement must seize the guilty sinner in that day! Sinners in Zion may well be afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrite: Who can dwell with devouring fire, and everlasting burnings? How will such cry, but in vain, to the mountains and rocks to hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb! When the great day of his wrath shall come, who amongst them all will be able to stand? Consider this then, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. Hear the gracious words that drop from the lips of your worthy fathers, and flee to the only refuge of poor perishing sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. Come, for all things are now ready! O come without delay, to the rich entertainment, the great supper, which the King of kings hath prepared for poor perishing sinners. *The oxen and the fatlings are killed, and all things are ready,* as you have heard from my worthy brother who addressed you in your native language, in the beginning of this opportunity. Neither he nor I may possibly ever address you any more upon such an occasion. To-day therefore whilst it is called to-day, if ye will hear our voice, harden not your hearts.—

5. Do the fathers die, and the prophets not live for ever; should not this consideration engage us to behave towards them in a tender and affectionate manner?

They are earthen vessels, and will soon be broken, do not then deal roughly and unkindly with them, but whilst they are continued to you, esteem, love, and provide comfortably for them. — You are not however to suffer *sin* to lie even upon a father. *Against an elder*, says the apostle, *receive not an accusation*, but *before two or three witnesses*; which supposes we may receive it, when just and well supported. The apostle adds, *them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear*, 1 Tim. v. 19, 20. And indeed by such faithful and friendly reproofs, we best shew our love to them, are most likely to recover them out of the snare they may have fallen into, and do most effectually vindicate the honor of our divine master and his holy religion.

6. Do fathers and prophets die; what reason have we to bewail the loss of such useful venerable men?

Of many of this character, who are now no more, it may be truly said, they were *burning and shining lights* in their day; they were the salt of the earth; the pillars of the church. With respect to many of our deceased fathers, we may adopt the language of David when he lamented over

Saul and Jonathan—*The beauty of Israel is slain, how are the mighty fallen!* 2 Sam. i. 19. Our venerable father who was to have addressed you on this occasion, was a father indeed, and greatly adorned the character he sustained. He was called by divine grace in early life, wore his profession well, held fast the form of sound words committed to him, in faith and love, was not ashamed of Christ or his gospel, but witnessed a good confession before many witnesses, and walked worthy of the vocation wherewith he was called. He was blest with strong natural powers, a good constitution, considerable gifts, and was very laborious and successful in the Lord's vineyard for a great number of years. In a word, as he was the natural father of a numerous family, so he was the spiritual father of many spiritual children. He was a father by office in the church where he presided, and in this annual assembly which he regularly attended for many years. But he is gone; the places that knew him shall know him no more. He is advanced to the great and glorious assembly above, and joined in society with those worthy fathers that were removed before him. May we who are left behind, be followers of him, in every thing wherein he followed Christ!

7. Are our fathers no more, and do the prophets not live for ever;—how thankful should we be, that nevertheless the great head of the church lives, and his word and statutes endure for ever?

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The permanency of the word amidst the mortality of ministers is the great support and comfort of the church of God, and of every true christian. Though ministers die, the gospel never dies. Though the vessels that hold the treasure may be and are daily broke, the treasure remains the same and is preserved still. In the room of the fathers sometimes the Lord is pleased to raise up the children to call him blessed. And pleasing indeed is the prospect we have of many young, pious, and promising ministers, who, we may hope, will fill up the places of their deceased fathers with reputation and success. A happy indication this, that the Lord is not about to leave us, but has mercy in store for us. But above all, what should most rejoice us is, that the great head of the church lives, and shall live for ever. Death hath no more dominion over him. He hath triumphed over death and the grave; and because *he* lives, his church and people *shall* live also. To him then let us ever look amidst every change, on him depend, from him derive all our comfort! He it was that raised up those fathers who in time past were ornaments to the church and the world; and he can, and we trust will raise up a succession of wise and able men, who shall, as instruments in his hand, successfully carry on the same glorious cause in which their predecessors were employed; building up the temple of the Lord, till the head-

head-stone is brought forth with shouting, crying Grace, grace unto it. On this foundation we may safely build for ourselves and others, the church and the world, time and eternity; and on no other.

“ Who builds on *lefs* than an immortal base,
“ Fond as he seems, condemns his joys to death.”

YOUNG.

12 MR 58

T H E E N D.

At an ASSOCIATION of the MINISTERS and
MESSENGERS of the BAPTIST CHURCHES
in WALES, held at the Meeting-House of the
Rev. Mr. EVAN DAVIS, in the Parish of
BAZALEG, in the County of MONMOUTH, on
the 9th and 10th of JUNE, 1773.

IT WAS RESOLVED, That an Enlargement of the Toleration-Act in favor of such Protestant Dissenters, who cannot legally qualify themselves as Ministers or School-Masters, under the present state of the said act, is much to be desired.

THAT this Association highly approves of the application for such enlargement, lately made to Parliament, by the general body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in and about London.

THAT this Association think themselves, and the whole Protestant Dissenting Interest, under great obligations to Sir HARRY HOUGHTON, and those other honorable and noble members of the legislature, who favored and promoted this application in both houses of parliament.

THAT the thanks of this Association be personally tendered to the following Gentlemen for their ready and friendly concurrence in supporting this application in the House of Commons, with an humble request for the continuance of their countenance and support, should the same
subject

subject happen to come before parliament in future, viz.
JOHN HANBURY, HUMPHREY MACKWORTH, CHARLES
MORGAN, JOHN MORGAN, Esqrs. Sir WILLIAM OWEN,
Baronet, HUGH OWEN, GRIFFITH PHILLIPS, the Right
Hon. GEORGE RICE, CHARLES VAN, and the Hon.
GEORGE VENABLES VERNON, Esqrs. and that a deputation
wait on them for that purpose.

THAT a copy of these Resolutions, signed by the Mo-
derator, be transmitted to the Rev. Dr. STENNET; and
that he be desired to lay the same before the Committee,
and before the general Body in London, and to intreat in
case it should be thought fit to renew the like application
hereafter, that it may be made also in the name of all the
Baptists in WALES: And that the Committee of the
general Body would please to act as a Committee likewise
for them.

12 MR 58

